

ASK Magazine

By practitioners for practitioners

Issue 7

LOOP

Check Out These Books



Dr. Michelle Collins is the Managing Editor of ASK Magazine. She is currently on a one-year detail to NASA Headquarters from Kennedy Space Center where for the past five years she has conducted research on air pollution control technology. She also is responsible for the Knowledge Sharing Initiative within NASA's Academy of Program & Project Leadership.

Fusion Leadership: Unlocking the Subtle Forces that Change People and Organizations
Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel (1998) Berett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Reviewed by Dr. Michelle Collins, NASA Headquarters

If you've already read books on leadership and organizational change by authors such as Moshe Rubinstein and Iris Firstenberg, Peter Senge, Tom Peters, and Steven Covey, and you were thinking of rereading them, you don't have to do that now. Just read this book instead. It's a *fusion* of many of their same concepts presented from a different view.

The book does not explore any particular subject in depth. Rather the authors "skim" many subjects and concepts, interlacing them to develop the concept of "*Fusion Leadership*".

The fundamental concept of treating people as people rather than machines is the main theme. "Fusion Leadership" is the process of fusing people together by nurturing six "subtle" forces: mindfulness, courage, vision, heart, communication, and integrity. To do so, hierarchy is diminished and responsibility both for one-self as well as for the team is emphasized.

There are a number of organizations and managers that will find such a change threatening. The concepts behind such a management style are straightforward and the benefits are intuitive once you've reflected on them; however, the obvious benefits of the behavioral change proposed in Fusion Leadership can be completely lost in a fear-based system.

The concept of caring about people in one's organization was the common thread in Chris Turner's book *All Hat, No Cattle* (see book review, ASK 5). Much is being written about the re-humanizing of the workplace, but the basis of it is so common sense that one wonders what's taking so long for the workplace to change?

Whether you're in a position to change your organization or simply your project team, you'll find the concepts in fusion leadership equally applicable.

Ratings:

Ease of Reading ★★★★★

Usefulness to Job ★★★★★

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Check Out These Books (cont'd)

Relax, It's Only Uncertainty: Lead The Way When The Way Is Changing.
Philip Hodgson and Randal White (2001). London: Pearson Education LTD.

Reviewed by Dr. Gerald Mulenberg, Ames Research Center

There are four types of people, Hodgson and White suggest, who will be attracted to the ideas in this book:

1. High-flyers: ambitious people who want the latest thinking in management and leadership.
2. High-learners: people who have even more curiosity than ambition.
3. High-worriers: people concerned about the rate of change and are looking for solutions.
4. High-careers: developers and sponsors of people.

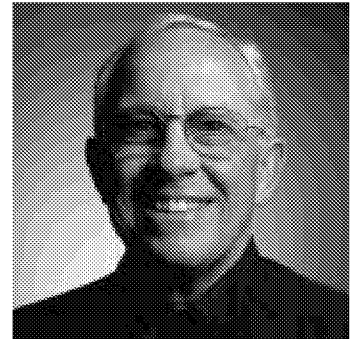
Doesn't that just about sum up everyone in NASA?

"Effective leadership is finding a good balance between behavior, context and need." Does this apply to you and/or your situation? If you're like most project managers, the answer is a resounding YES.

The authors believe that a "relaxed leader is more likely to be the most effective," and describe behaviors necessary to have this confidence. The basic premise is that attitude matters, and behavior counts. It is perhaps the first book on leadership to suggest that at some point it is necessary for everyone to be a leader: "...leadership is not a status, it's a state of mind."

They argue that, "...the real mark of a leader is confidence with uncertainty--the ability to admit to it and deal with it...*ambiguity is how it is, and uncertainty is how you feel about it* (italics added)." They then offer help in handling the ambiguity that leads to this uncertainty, and not only by clarifying the role of a leader, but also by explaining how one can assume that role.

Everyone needs to be able to handle the ambiguity that leads to uncertainty in today's world. Just as much, we need to realize that the approach we used last time may not work now. Hodgson and White focus on two types of ambiguity that create uncertainty: 1) ambiguity that can be mitigated by using expert knowledge, and 2) ambiguity where everything is new and there are no experts to call on (as in many NASA projects). They concentrate mostly on the second type, and provide readers, "...with a genuine set of workable skills that they can



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apply immediately and which will enhance the rest of their lives and careers."

Whether you have been thrust into a leadership role or consciously sought it out, the authors show you how to identify where your strengths lie and explain how these can help you to be a leader. In addition, they show how to identify what your weaknesses may be, and offer some easy and effective ways to create positive change that will help you to become a better leader.

The authors describe the book as their "field notes," the result of 10 years of research in over 30 countries and 100 organizations. They provide many examples and brief exercises to help you identify and understand your own behaviors, and then show how to enhance these behaviors to become a better leader. This is not a how-to book about project management. It is, however, an excellent book for project managers who want to understand how to be a more effective leader.

I think this book is a must read for anyone in, or planning to take on a leadership role in NASA.

Ratings:

Ease of Reading ★★★★★

Usefulness to Job ★★★★★☆